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1984 Kansans of the Year — Bob and Elizabeth Dole

By GENE SOUTH
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He's tall, witty and darkly handsome; she's pretty, gracious and a Phi Beta Kappa to boot. Both have spent their adult lives in public service.

And between them, they are the most powerful couple ever to represent The Wheat State on the national scene — which is why they share recognition as 1984 Kansans of the Year.

"Charles Curtis was the first Republican majority leader in the Senate who was a Kansan," Bob Dole observed this week. "I was elected majority leader 60 years later to the day."

That was Nov. 28, 1964, three days after Thanksgiving, and that vote among his Senate colleagues made Robert Joseph Dole, the one-time Russell newspaper boy and soda jerk, perhaps the second most powerful man in the world's most powerful nation. "The highest ranking Republican in this town is the president, and I think most people would say the second highest ranking Republican is the majority leader of the Senate, so it just seemed to me if I do my job as I hope I can, there are a lot of possibilities," said the Kansas senior senator, discussing the reasons why he ran to succeed retiring Majority Leader Howard Baker, the Tennessee Republican who chose not to stand for re-election last fall.

Not that Bob Dole was any Washington pogan before that! He was, in fact, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee — which holds the ultimate power of the purse strings over both the Reagan Administration and, to some extent, over Congress itself. He chaired his last Finance Committee meeting Wednesday, and will take over his new post this week.

The majority leader's job carries a few extra perks — more staff, a chauffeur-driven limousine (one of three provided in the U.S. government) if he chooses to use it, and a raise in salary.

The raise, reported a member of his staff, brings him up to within \$1,244 of his wife's \$83,300 salary — for Elizabeth Hanford Dole is the nation's first woman Department of Transportation secretary, responsible for 102,000 employees in nine major branches with a total budget of \$28 billion. Because the U.S. Coast Guard works for her, she is the first woman in history to command an American military service. The Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, and a whole handful of other alphabet agencies report to her.

Elizabeth Dole (not Libby, please, and certainly not Liz; Lizzy, if you absolutely must) is an adopted Kansan, of course. A native of Salisbury, N.C., the contained graciousness of her manner and the molasses accent conjure up mental visions of magnolias and manor houses — but she votes these days in Russell and makes regular visits to the state with her husband, whom she married Dec. 6, 1975.

Bob Dole was Jerry Ford's vice-presidential choice in 1976 and in 1979-80, he was briefly a candidate in his own right, in the same field as Ronald Reagan. He may be a candidate again in '88, depending on the political weather.

If he is not the GOP contender, Elizabeth Dole could very well end up the vice-presidential nominee. At the 1984 Republican national convention, there were "Dole Dole '88" buttons, a lot of smiles, a few quips — and lots of visibility. There was a time, not too many years ago, when Bob Dole said realistically that he was not a nationally-known name; when he traded a brand name by passing out pineapple juice at partisan rallies.

Those days are over. Everyone knows who Bob Dole is now, from the White House to the Kremlin and beyond. And Elizabeth is even on TV these days, urging children to buckle up their seat belts. It can't hurt . . .

Mary Elizabeth Hanford was something of a Golden Girl when she married the former Republican National Chairman nine years ago, at 39.

Born into a wealthy business family, she demonstrated a taste for public service early when she was elected president of her high school class (at a time when girls weren't running for posts like that). She repeated the feat a few years later while attending Duke University, where she earned her baccalaureate degree (and her Phi Beta Kappa key).

She followed that with study at England's prestigious Oxford University, earned an M.A. from Harvard, and capped that in turn with an L.L.B. from its law school. She tried private practice, often defending indigents in court, then spent a year as staff assistant to



ELIZABETH AND BOB DOLE

the Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. From that point on, her career has moved inexorably upward.

Cited as one of America's outstanding young women in 1970 (and the OYW of D.C.), she received the Arthur S. Flemming Award for outstanding government service in 1972, a year after becoming deputy director of the new Office of Consumer Affairs. She served as a member of the Federal Trade Commission, was assistant to the president for public liaison 1981-83, and finally was tapped by Reagan to join his Cabinet as head of DOT — a post she assumed Feb. 7, 1983.

These days, she's often suggested as a successor to U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. Bob Dole's path has not been so smooth.

The oldest son of four children born to Doran Dole (who ran the Russell Elevator and sold cream, eggs and feed) and his wife Bina, Bob grew up working at odd jobs to help out. He nailed down his first salaried job at age 12, working in a local drug store. In high school, he lettered three straight years in basketball, football and track; became president of Hi-Y and a member of the National Honor Society. He enrolled in The University of Kansas as a pre-med student, played football and basketball, and nearly broke the indoor record for the quarter mile.

But there was a war on in Europe, and young Dole, already in the Reserves, asked for active duty. On June 1, 1943, he got it. A year later, he was sent to Officer Candidate School at Ft. Benning, Ga. — a healthy 186-pound 20-year-old. By winter, he was in Rome.

On Feb. 25, 1945, 2nd Lt. Dole was assigned as a platoon leader in "I" Company, 3rd Battalion, 85th Mountain Regiment, 10th Mountain Division — an elite, specially-trained force that already had earned the reputation of never surrendering ground it had won.

Dole lasted six weeks. In that time, he was wounded twice, won the Bronze Star for valor — and earned his veteran platoon's respect as "the best platoon leader we ever had."

On April 14, 1945, British and American forces launched "Operation Craftsman," their spring offensive to drive the Germans out of Italy. Advancing up the Po Valley that day, the 10th Mountain Division took more casualties than all other Allied forces combined. One of them was Lt. Dole, who was trying to take a hill designated "913," and drive on three miles beyond it.

Crossing a clearing, German fire shattered Dole's right shoulder bone, the upper arm and a vertebra and shocking the spinal cord, causing paralysis of all four limbs, bladder and bowel muscles. It was nine hours before he was delivered to an evacuation hospital, and more than once he was given up for dead.

He was too tough for that. He was to spend most of the next three years in hospitals, lose his right kidney, permanently lose most of the use of his right hand and arm, survive a temperature of more than 108 degrees and blood clots in the lungs; would become one of the first patients in the nation to be aided by the new experimental drug streptomycin — but he lived.

Basketball was a lost hope. Football the same. He would compete in no more track meets. And no one would ever call for "Dr. Dole."

Surely, lying in hospitals in Italy and North Africa, Dole has his moments of black despair. Any man would. But he has rarely referred to them and then only obliquely. Indeed, in Winter General Hospital at Topeka, Kan., still unable to walk or

feed himself, Capt. Dole devoted much of his time to cheering up his fellow patients. "They used to wheel me around to the other wards," he said this week, remembering. "You don't have to be around very long before you find out there are a lot of people in worse shape than you are." He added, explaining his ability to quip with his fellow victims. But he admitted as far as his own future was concerned, looking at his wrecked 128-pound frame, "I didn't think much of anything would happen . . ."

Nevertheless, Dole was determined to "get those years back," if there was a way to do it — and as soon as he was able to walk, he did, pushing himself. He did exercises; for years carried a squeeze ball to strengthen the grip of his left hand. Twice he underwent special surgery to improve the use of his right arm.

Bob Dole went back to college, earned a law degree in 1952 from Washburn University, and was elected to the Kansas House of Representatives at age 28 — the first step on a political road he has followed since.

He returned to Russell to spend eight years as county attorney; then, in 1960, was elected to Congress. And when Frank Carlson, Kansas' senior senator, decided to retire in 1968, he did so in the hope that a young war veteran named Dole would succeed him. Dole did — learning the ways of power in the hub of the world, slowly increasing his effectiveness. He became a powerful Senate voice for agriculture. He became national party chairman.

Even then, it was not to be all uphill. In 1976, Gerald R. Ford chose Dole as his vice-presidential running mate. They lost — narrowly.

The teams strategy had been for Gerald Ford to hang around the White House and act presidential while Dole's acerbic wit (he already was famous for having dubbed Richard Nixon's "Committee to Re-elect the President" — "CREEP") and ability to think on his feet provided the chief attack weapon against Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale.

Perhaps Ford didn't act sufficiently presidential despite two years of on-the-job training. Or perhaps, as some claimed, it was because Dole's "gun-sliding" (his term) was so effective it rebounded to the ticket's detriment. More likely, it was a combination of the mood of the nation and a better job in the precincts by the Democrats.

In any case, it was sufficient to whet Dole's appetite for national office; to propel him into a crowded field of presidential hopefuls in 1979 — at the same moment he also was running for re-election as a senator in Kansas. To make matters worse, he spent much of his time in Wash-

ington, fulfilling the duties of his Senate office. He did poorly in early presidential primaries as a result — and almost neglected his Senate campaign too long, hastily putting things right in person at the eleventh hour.

But Dole learns from his mistakes. Those things won't happen again. He's said nothing publicly about the presidency since 1980 — but he's staked a solid claim to the middle of the road within his own party, demonstrated his independence from Reagan as well as from Nixon (and shown his clout by insisting on appointment of Thomas Block as secretary of agriculture), re-emphasized his attractiveness (and his wife's) at the '84 convention, and pointed up his strategic skill by winning election as majority leader.

And there are other things. "He's learned how to say 'Thank you,'" reported a long-time Dole associate. "There was a time when he didn't thank people." Another staffer agreed. "I don't know what caused that change; I think Elizabeth has helped. He used to kind of take the staff for granted . . ."

The problem with Dole is that his work is his hobby. He works all the time, demands the utmost from himself, and tends to assume the same machinelike reflexes in others. "Bob really doesn't have any hobbies or things like that, and part of that is because of his physical limitations," said long-time Kansas political associate Dave Owen of Kansas City. "And so he's just turned his whole energies toward politics . . ."

That single-minded dedication to his career, in fact, may have been the rock upon which his first marriage, to hospital physical therapist Phyllis Holden in 1948, foundered in '72.

Yet that same drive may be one of the main ties in his marriage to the Southern career woman. "They're both workaholics," said Mrs. Judy Kay, a veteran Bob Dole staffer. "That's probably why they get along as well as they do."

Elizabeth Dole denies she is "a workaholic," but admits she normally puts in 13-hour days and takes work home as well. The senator doesn't bother to deny the same label. Like her husband, Elizabeth Dole thrives on the public life; indeed, her career has been built around it.

As Owen remarked, "They both have been so successful and so busy — Elizabeth puts in just as tough a schedule as Bob does — but when they do get a chance, they spend quality time together. They obviously spend lots of time away from each other, but they both know the importance of the other person in their life, and they never lose sight of that. They talk every day, when they're apart."

And there's another factor. "They're very respectful of each other's career and very supportive," Owen continued. "Bob is so proud of Elizabeth; he is just really her No. 1 fan, and vice versa. So what's the bottom line? What does it mean for Kansas — and for the nation — to have Bob and Elizabeth Dole as Secretary of Transportation?"

The new Senate leader says his top priority hasn't changed. As finance chairman, his goal was to reduce the federal budget, and that's still his goal. "A lot of our constituents are gonna be unhappy in the short run . . . that's pretty good for everybody. You don't like it, but I think people expect us to make tough decisions."

Beyond that, he intends to "try to persuade our colleagues on both sides of the aisle" to act together on key legislation in a number of areas, including foreign policy, defense, arms control, and other fields where he has not previously been too active. And he wants to work on a "market-oriented, export-oriented" farm program to help U.S. agriculture.

In short, Bob Dole talks of expanding his activities into new fields. And when this hard-working, driven man is asked where he'll find the time to tackle all these new challenges, he pauses briefly and says finally, "I don't know. I'm just gonna have to try to figure that out; rework my priorities. You have to start in the morning at 7, and you don't get home till midnight. It doesn't leave you much space in there. But it's gonna be an exciting time!"

And at his concluding remark, you can just hear the eagerness in Bob Dole's voice; the willingness to accept the challenge.

Krueger calls Dole "a master of the possible;" and says, "He has the best street sense I've ever seen," while Elizabeth "has a good feel for people. She has a strangehold on reality."

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As for Elizabeth, she says, "We've got a lot of initiatives we're looking forward to implementing — a lot of them in the railroad field that will impact Kansas, by the way — (so) I really do have my focus on the agenda before us. I think there are challenges that lie ahead," in particular the pursuit of safety among the various means of public transportation, modernizing the aerospace system, developing space transport, selling ConRail, the all freight railroad . . . "There's just a whole pile of things!"

Again, the eagerness is apparent. It makes one wonder how they ever found time for courtship. . . . Bob concedes his new job "may be self-destructing in two years, but again, two years is a long time. No one knows how long they're gonna have in time — and I think it can last beyond two years." Meanwhile, he's delighted to be where he is. "I talked to Howard Baker; he said, 'Some days it's the best job in town, other days it's the worst job in town.' It's rewarding. I think in the sense that it's probably something, I didn't think would happen."

It seems likely both will get their wish. As Krueger remarked of Bob, "The thing I love most about him is that he never gives up. I might think something is finished, and I'll quit and go on to something else, but Dole never gives up. Never!" The same, obviously, is true of Elizabeth.

It's easy to see why, together, they form Kansas' power connection.

Elizabeth stresses while "I feel flattered" by the speculation around Washington about her for U.N. ambassador (assuming Mrs. Kirkpatrick succeeds Michael Deaver at the White House), "I really like what I'm doing!"

Ask them about their personal futures, and how they'd like to be remembered, and Bob replies he hopes to serve as an example to "a lot of disabled in the country," while Elizabeth says, "I like to feel that I can really lend a helping hand."

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